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Section C: Teacher Education

Doing it Differently. Link and Learn – the work of the Indigenous Education and Training Alliance

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Introduction

The *Indigenous Education and Training Alliance* (IETA) is a staff college of Education Queensland. Its primary focus is to broker and deliver professional development to educators around the policies contained within *Partners for Success: strategy for the continuous improvement of education and employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Education Queensland* (Education Queensland, 2000b). This paper describes how IETA's work to support one of the policies, *Literacy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students,* has been theorised and enacted. It also discusses the organisation's successes and challenges in the significant area of language and literacy pedagogy for Indigenous students.

Background

> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the most disadvantaged group in the country. Whatever social indicator you use – health

status, education, employment, contact with the law- we are at the bottom of the heap. How did this situation come about? And why is it proving so resistant to change? (O'Donoghue, 1995: 6-7).

The 'gap' in educational achievement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners is the subject of national and international concern. 'Expanding inequality is recognised, along with ecological risk, as the most serious problem confronting world societies' (Giddens,1999 cited in Martinez,2000: 1). In an increasingly globalising world 'Literacy is a key capability for citizens to understand and influence changes within society becomes a critical feature of a robust, participatory democracy' (Lo Bianco and Freebody, 2001).

In an attempt to address the specific needs of Indigenous students, both the Commonwealth and Education Queensland have published policies to guide schools' responses to 'at risk' learners. At a Federal level policies include the *National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2000-2004 (NIELNS),* (Department of Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2000) and *Literacy for All (Adelaide Declaration)* (Department of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 1998)

The *National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2000-2004* (DETYA, 2000) focuses on a cluster of issues around literacy and numeracy, namely, attendance, health, pre-schooling experiences, future aspirations, meaningful community partnerships, community and business leadership and the employment, and retention of effective teachers. This policy reflects the thrust of the *Adelaide Declaration* (DEETYA, 1998) identifying 'literacy' as a key factor in educational achievement, employment and economic development for Indigenous people and communities.

The goal of literacy capability is not merely one for education. Literacy capability for all is a compact of citizenship, securing for all Australians the principal means for participation in democratic institutions and processes. Universal and broad literacy capability is also an investment in human development to strengthen Australian social and economic progress. Finally and ultimately it is an achievement of Australian civilisation and culture since literacy is the principal avenue for the enrichment, diversification and on-going development of a lively, distinctive and cohesive nation. (Lo Bianco and Freebody, 2001: vi)

The concept of literacy itself is problematic, as there is not simple, commonly held definition of what 'literacy' is. Lo Bianco and Freebody (1997: 28) argue that literacy has been defined from:

> skills-based conceptions of functional literacy through to very broad and all-encompassing definitions, which integrate social and political empowerment.

The literacy review conducted by Education Queensland in 2000 (*Literate Futures,* Education Queensland, 2000c: 3) defines literacy as:

> ...the flexible and sustainable mastery of a repertoire of practices with the texts of traditional and new communications technologies via spoken language, print and multimedia.

It raises concern about the ongoing under-provision of effective literacy programs and practices for disadvantaged groups, particularly boys, those from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB), Indigenous, non-urban and socio-economically disadvantaged students and specifically highlights the 'potentially counterproductive but forceful discourse of 'new deficits' that runs the risk of blaming students, their families and communities for literacy problems' (Education Queensland, 2000c: 7).

At a state level, in 2000, the Director-General of Education Queensland (Education Queensland, 2000c:21), prompted by:

> The persistence of unacceptable differences between the outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and others in Education Queensland

authorised a *Review of Education and Employment Programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Education Queensland.* One of its major recommendations was 'ensuring that curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, reporting and employment policies and programs effectively meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' (Education Queensland, 2000c: 3).

This review led to *Partners for Success: strategy for the continuous improvement of Education and Employment Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Education Queensland.* (Education Queensland, 2000b). Policy focus is on:

- building effective partnerships between Indigenous communities and Education Queensland

- negotiating accountability frameworks

- achieving greater coherence in the delivery of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, their families and communities

- ensuring that curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, reporting and human resources policies and programs effectively meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The *Review* (2000a: 5) acknowledged that:

> ...the absence of systemic policies providing clear direction on critical issues in education and employment has led to confusion, misconceptions, ad-hoc decision making and, at times, questionable practice.

The focus on second language pedagogy

The unacceptably large gap between the *literacy* levels of Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students was considered a significant enough issue in the *Review* (Education Queensland, 2000a: 28-32) to merit detailed consideration. In this discussion, although recognition is given to the interrelated risk factors, which contribute to poor literacy performance, the major focus is on second language pedagogy and assessment instruments. Most significantly the *Review* (Education Queensland, 2000a: 30) states that:

> There is little recognition in policy that students who are Aboriginal English and Torres Strait Creole speakers need different educational responses from others...Commonwealth and State ESL funding processes do not adequately consider Indigenous ESL issues. The absence of recognition and direction in policy in this area has resulted in the application of a universal approach to literacy and intervention, which is educationally inappropriate for the literacy learning of non-Standard-Australian-English speakers.
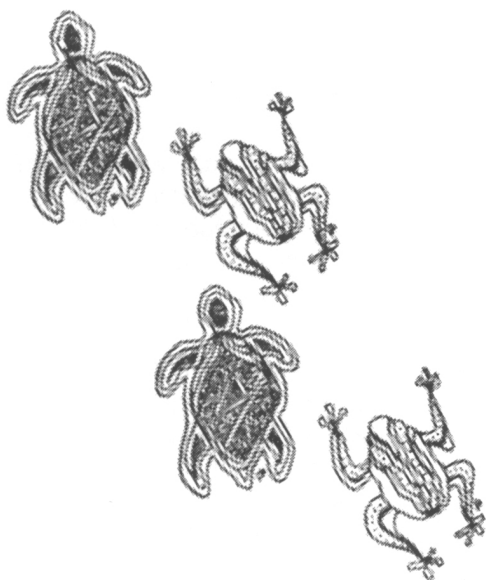
Thus, the *Partners for Success* strategy (Education Queensland, 2000a) is quite distinct from current national policies which use 'literacy' as a catch-all term for diverse groups of learners, putting the distinct needs of both migrant and Indigenous second language learners in direct competition with mainstream literacy priorities and positioning these students in a more general category of low-literacy learners. The Queensland strategy specifically highlights second language learning as a key factor in success in literacy. It advocates pre-service and in-service teacher education in cross-cultural pedagogy and ESL pedagogy and posits that literacy outcomes will be improved for this group of students when second language pedagogy and assessment are used. In some key respects this strategy is unique. It is the first time that 'ESLness' has been so specifically and explicitly highlighted as a major contributory factor in Indigenous literacy performance and that a flexible accountability framework has been developed which gives both scope for individual communities to prioritise their own needs and guides educators towards second language learning needs.

It was in this unique and contradictory policy context that the *Indigenous Education and Training Alliance* (IETA) had to frame its work around second language and literacy pedagogy. We were mindful that this is urgent business and that:

> Literacy is a key issue in educational disadvantage pertaining to Aboriginal people, however 'Western' models of literacy and education may be out of tune with crucial aspects of Aboriginal cultures, beliefs and values. Literacy education for Aboriginal peoples has a regrettable history of cultural bias and deficit images, of remedial and inappropriate developmental approaches and assessment models in education resulting in damaging educational and social outcomes from schooling for indigenous people. (Lo Bianco and Freebody, 2001: 40)

The *Partners for Success* (Education Queensland, 2000b) strategy identified several priority groups for the professional development:

teachers, principals (a particularly important group in view of the school-based management that exists in Queensland) and Indigenous graduates of the Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP).

Key questions became:

• What might second language and literacy pedagogy look like in Indigenous contexts?

• What were the specific professional development needs of educators to be effective with those Indigenous learners, learning through a second or third language?

• How might we learn from other Australian and international contexts?

• How could we deliver appropriate, quality professional development statewide in a flexible, cost-efficient manner? What modes of delivery would be most effective?

• How could we be inclusive of all our client groups?

• How could we avoid replication of the failures of the past?

• How might we frame this professional development within the current initiatives of Education Queensland, particularly in the light of *2010: Queensland State Education* (Education Queensland, 2000d), *Literate Futures* (Education Queensland, 2000e) and the *Queensland Schools Longitudinal Research Study* (Education Queensland, 2000f)

Review of the literature

We looked to the national and international academic literature to frame our initiatives. There is a wide body of academic literature relating to the second language acquisition of minority language learners worldwide. Cummins (1986, 1989, 1994) proposes that the historical construction of language, race and power plays a significant role in the underachievement of minority students in schools and posits that social context, especially power relations across

ethnic groups are critical factors in their language learning and achievement. He identifies the following common factors as significant for those minority groups who perform most poorly in schools (1989: 17-18):

• in a dominated relationship with the Anglo majority for centuries
• denied the opportunity to assimilate
• given segregated and inferior education for generations
• prevented from full participation and advancement
and have
• internalised an inferior self-image.
• The explanation of school failure has been attributed to inherent deficiencies in the individual. This, in turn serves to deflect the attention away from systemic structures and practices, which contribute to failure.

All of these elements could be said to relate to Indigenous Australians with the additional factor that, in Australia, identification of some Indigenous learners as second language learners is relatively recent (Shnukal, 1996; Malcolm, 2001) This is more to do with socio-historical constructions of language than any linguistic considerations.

Malcolm (2001:11) goes as far as to say that, in Australia:

> Education systems have, for the most part, implicitly denied its [Aboriginal English] existence by assuming that if Aboriginal children speak English they speak the same English as non-Aboriginal people, and should be subjected to literacy instruction and testing based on standard Australian English. When they fail to achieve comparable literacy levels in standard Australian English to those of other Australians, what is questioned is never the rightness of denying their cultural identity by ignoring their unique cultural heritage, but rather the students' ability, or their home situation, or their social disadvantage, or their lack of motivation.

The Australian situation resonates with Cummins' (1986: viii) proposition regarding language minority students worldwide in that:

> Schools historically have reflected the societal power structure by eradicating minority students'

language and identity and by attributing their school failure to inherent deficiencies.

The implications for us, then, were to make explicit the differences between the languages Indigenous children often speak as Home Languages (HL) and the Standard Australian English (SAE) language variety of schooling. We needed to make language the major focus of cross-cultural teaching situations. In summary, it seemed critical that teachers in Queensland schools be skilled in the teaching of Standard Australian English as a second language/dialect if they were to be effective with this group of learners. ESL pedagogy is a specialist skill (Hammond and Derewianka, 1999), requiring a depth of knowledge about the English language and cross-cultural interactions beyond that required of a good 'literacy' teacher. These skills are not generally core components of pre-service teacher education programs, even though Queensland schools are characterised by their cultural and linguistic diversity rather than by their homogeneity. The current challenge for Queensland schools is:

> how can responsiveness to difference be brought to bear on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment so as to generate improved standards of intellectual quality in students' performance, as well as potent forms of civic involvement? (Martinez, 2000: 10)

Lo Bianco and Freebody (2001: 55) suggest a way forward in the Australian context:

> There is wide agreement that students from language backgrounds other than English, whether indigenous or immigrant in origin, or who speak a dialect of English other than that taken for granted in schooling are best served by explicit teaching within a context of rich language experience involving bilingual and ESL or public/standard English support, in the context of regular classroom practice.

We considered the changes and current curriculum and pedagogical demands of 'regular classroom practice' in Queensland. We were conscious that the 'explicit' teaching had to be specific and deep enough to address the needs of second language learners whilst ensuring that

we were encouraging good practice within a balanced, futures-orientated literacy pedagogy. Whilst some communities believed it desirable to 'import' specialist ESL teachers into Indigenous community schools, it was simply not practical. Furthermore, our data collection (to be discussed below) suggested that ESL specialist teachers did not necessarily transplant well into Indigenous contexts. The issue of teacher turnover is significant in remote areas and that model of intervention and support would not contribute to the sustainability of the initiative. In addition, we were very aware that the linguistic and cultural resources which Indigenous educators bring to the schooling experiences of students were often overlooked by non-Indigenous teachers and principals. We believed (and this was later supported by our data collection) that we already had significant workforce capability among our Indigenous educators. These educators needed to be supported in order to implement this initiative.

Cummins (1989: 51) also focuses on the impact that individual teachers can have in minority student achievement: '...discriminatory structures are manifested in the *interactions* that minority students and communities experience with *individual* educators'. So, we reasoned, we would have to work on values and expectations as well as on the language skills of educators. Again, this was supported by our data collection. Gray (1999) suggests that the typical teacher response (referring primarily to Australian Indigenous Community School contexts) to a student who is unable to do a task is to lower the standard or reduce classroom practice to 'busywork' with little cognitive demand.

This suggestion echoes the findings of the Queensland Schools Longitudinal Research Study (Education Queensland, 2000f), which identifies intellectual quality as a key area for concern.
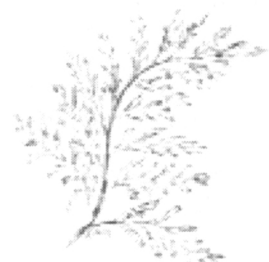
Data collection

Our data collection was collected between January 2000 and June 2002 from over 40 schools across the state and from Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers and teaching assistants in the schools and participants in our professional development workshops.

Education Queensland initiatives

We scanned Education Queensland's major reviews over the same period for key areas for concern/action and these are summarised below.

Literate Futures (Education Queensland, 2000c) identified:

- Dealing with diversity was a key issue.

- Schools have to be futures-orientated and responsive to the *multiliteracies* required in a changing, globalising world.

- There needed to be renewed focus on the teaching of reading in Queensland.

Queensland Schools Longitudinal Reform Study (Education Queensland, 2000f) indicated:

- There needed to be more focus on the intellectual quality of learning experiences.

- Dealing with diversity was a key issue.

2010: Queensland State Education (2000e):

- Dealing with diversity was a key issue.

- Skilling of the workforce is a priority.

What teachers told us(anecdotal data, data collected from teacher interviews, feedback from professional development sessions and surveys):

- Pre-service teacher education courses did not address the issue of language.

- In-service professional development courses did not address the issue of language.

- Monitoring and tracking instruments were designed for English first language learners.

- Good 'literacy' practice did not yield the expected results.

- The pace of educational change often seemed overwhelming and it was difficult to see the links between different initiatives.

- Indigenous teachers who were not English first language speakers indicated that they wanted to improve their English language skills and had never been able to access specific professional development in this area.

- Face-to face delivery with opportunities to share practice and ongoing support from within and beyond the schools was the preferred professional development model.

Systemic data

These data, collected from publicly available statistics and documents, indicated:

- Indigenous student outcomes using standardised testing instruments were poor in comparison with non-Indigenous students.

- Teacher turnover in remote community schools is very high.

- There is a high proportion of new teachers in remote community schools.

- Attendance rates in community schools are poor.

- School retention rates beyond Grade 10 are poor for Indigenous students in both remote and urban communities.

- The School Performance Accountability Framework (SPAF) does not include measurement of the key actions under the *Partners for Success* strategy (Education Queensland, 2000b).

- Under school-based management, most resourcing goes directly to schools.

- Indigenous teachers trained under the Remote Area Teacher Education Program needed to upgrade their qualifications to access career pathways with Education Queensland.

Section C — Teacher Education

Destination 2010 - our journey

We accept the conclusions of *2010:Queensland State Education* (Education Queensland, 2000f: 21) which identifies a quality professional development program as central to human resource management and will be based on:

- providing the opportunity for all teachers to acquire minimum standards in priority areas;

- delivery methods that integrate professional development with school operations

- facilitating access for teachers through mentoring, on-site and action learning, work-shadowing, just-in-time delivery and networking.

Our task, therefore, was to deliver professional development across a variety of contexts and client groups, pre-school, primary, secondary educators, Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers and principals, community teachers and teachers' aides.

- A reference group brainstormed what pedagogical 'tools' would be useful to teachers working with Indigenous students who are learning in a second or subsequent language. Three existing professional development packages were identified which had been used with success in Indigenous contexts in Australia - *Teaching English as a Second Language to Indigenous Students (TESLIS)* (Department of Education Queensland and South Australia, 1997), *Fostering English Language in Kimberley Schools* (Catholic Education, WA, 1997) and *Walking Talking Texts* (Northern Territory Department of Education, 1994). Our research revealed that all our target groups identified upskilling in the English language as an area of need. Experience and our data collection indicated that all the above professional development packages presuppose a level of grammatical knowledge about English that our client groups stated they did not have. ESL methodology in any context requires detailed grammatical knowledge beyond that required of a good 'literacy' teacher (Derewianka and Hammond, 1991).

- We decided to add to this suite of professional development packages, an introductory module, *How English Works*. We used our in-house expertise (the Senior Project Officer is a linguist and lectures at James Cook University of North Queensland) and links with academic staff at James Cook University to develop this two-day course, which deals specifically with the 'basics' of English grammar and the implications for Indigenous learners at the same time making explicit reference to Queensland curriculum and pedagogical initiatives.

- We were concerned that any professional development brokered or delivered by IETA should be of the highest standard. We therefore negotiated with JCU to give credit for these professional development modules in their Bachelor and Masters programs under a recognition of prior learning arrangement (RPL).

- We also negotiated accreditation of the modules as part of the RATEP upgrade program (a NIELNS initiative through Education Queensland to upgrade RATEP trained teachers to four-year trained teachers) thereby addressing a key issue raised by Indigenous teachers.

- Electronic modes of delivery would be the most cost-efficient but every client group expressed a strong preference for face-to-face delivery, complemented by post-professional development support in-school and via networking, teleconferencing, email and webconferencing.

- This accreditation process gave us a framework upon which to build further professional development in other areas and a basis upon which to negotiate with other Queensland universities to incorporate the modules into existing courses. Now we had some framing around how we might deliver the professional development around second language and literacy pedagogy across the state.

Link and Learn — a shared leadership model

We decided that the best way of implementing this initiative and supporting educators would be by *linking* with each other within IETA and beyond, *sharing* the leadership of the initiative and drawing upon the wide expertise inside and outside the organisation and *learning* from each other. We see ourselves as an enabling organisation as well as one which delivers and brokers professional development.

- We were conscious that policy can drive interactions all the way to the classroom so we ensured that we had representation on all reference groups involved in policy and curriculum initiatives. This was a difficult task as Indigenous issues are sometimes seen as peripheral rather than core business.

- We supported the Torres Strait district in the development of their district-wide ESL strategy, which was based on extensive community consultation.

- Within IETA we forged a close working team of the Senior ESL Project Officer, the statewide RATEP coordinator and the statewide RATEP upgrade project coordinator. By working in this way, we were quickly able to identify that the main drivers of this initiative at a school level were the Indigenous teachers. Often, the Indigenous teachers are the only educators who remain in communities for periods of longer than two years. Frequently second or third language learners themselves, they have themselves experienced the difficulties students may have in accessing the curriculum. Furthermore, they have rich linguistic and cultural resources upon which they can draw to allow students and non-Indigenous teachers to engage with learning in their own context. *Partners for success* (Education Queensland, 2000b) focuses upon community input and leadership in establishing school priorities and directions.

- The Learning Development Centres, Literacy, are the systemic vehicles for supporting the professional development around Whole School Literacy Planning and the teaching of

reading. We linked with the Learning Development Centre, *Literacy North* (a consortium of three schools in the Cairns region with significant proportions of Indigenous students) and deliver joint professional development sessions, making the links between the second language and literacy pedagogy we are promoting and institutional requirements.

The successes

- More than 1000 educators around the State will have received professional development in second language and literacy pedagogy around the state from IETA in 2002 alone.

- Evaluations from participants are overwhelmingly positive.

- Fifty RATEP-trained teachers around the state are currently engaged in an upgrade program, using the second language and literacy pedagogy modules as accredited courses. This cohort has shared their practice with teachers around the state.

- Indigenous teachers in communities are taking on roles as ESL support teachers. Some of these teachers are teaching the English language in tri-lingual communities.

- Demand for IETA's modules is huge and increasing.

- Requests have been made for IETA to develop a competency-based English language course for all educators.

- IETA's work is attracting National and International interest.

- Pre-service institutions are interested in linking with IETA to incorporate second language and literacy pedagogy into their teacher education programs.

The tyranny of distance

A major issue for remote schools is access to professional development, especially whole-staff professional development as travel costs are prohibitive and replacement teachers difficult to find. It was decided that the professional development would be carried out at the school sites. Schools would be encouraged to 'cluster'

geographically. Cognisant of the issues around finding replacement teachers and the need for flexibility around delivery, we made the decision that IETA personnel would travel widely to remote areas and conduct professional development sessions predominantly at the weekends, with principals negotiating early school closures or student-free days with staff and communities in order that all educators could participate. Obviously, this practice does not fit neatly with institutional procedures. 'Doing it differently' has had implications at all levels for teachers, those involved in the delivery of professional development, and administrators.

Challenges

Current challenges for IETA include:

Sustainability. The successes described above are the result of individual and team commitment to this urgent business. The major resource has been a single Band 6 Senior Project Officer responsible for developing, writing and implementing the whole of the state response to ESL pedagogy. Systemic valuing and further resourcing will be a key issues for the continuance of this initiative.

Demand-stemming the flow whilst dealing with the inundation. The demand for this professional development by far outstrips IETA's capacity to meet it. IETA is training trainers to carry it forward but, as yet, there is no pool of appropriately skilled personnel. We have worked in partnership with a few academic staff at universities but, again, there are few skilled people in this area. No pre-service course in Queensland incorporates explicit teaching of the English language as it links to Queensland curriculum and Indigenous second language learners. Quite patently this initiative is not sustainable if pre-service institutions do not recognise this as core business.

School Improvement Accountability Framework (SIAF). Systemic accountability measures are powerful ways of directing interactions at a school level. Only what is

measured counts. Management of Queensland schools is school-based. Principals decide on school professional development needs and priorities. It is crucial that the key actions described in *Partners for Success* (Education Queensland, 2000b) are visible in the systemic accountability framework (SIAF) if they are to be carried out, have longevity and become central to teachers' work.

Conclusion

As an organisation IETA is working in exciting times. Our initiatives have attracted national and international attention. We have achieved and are still achieving great success with our *Link and Learn* model at an individual, organisational and systemic level. We are fortunate to have an expert team of highly competent individuals with a passionate commitment to improving outcomes for Indigenous people in Education Queensland. We have put in place ways in which the capacity of the organisation and individual communities might be increased. The longevity of our initiatives will now depend on the Education Queensland's priorities in setting and resourcing its strategic directions.

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